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Aspects of Maryam Jameelah's Post-Conversion Understanding of Islam

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Abstract

Maryam Jameelah (1934–2012) was a fourth-generation American-Jewish woman. After embracing Islam, she migrated to and settled in Pakistan. She is generally perceived as a fervent supporter of fundamentalist Islam. Her perception of religion is generally discussed in conjunction with her conversion. This results in finding reasons for her preference for Islam over other religions. However, it is often ignored that after embracing Islam, she lived more than fifty years propagating it. By exploring her published works as well as unpublished manuscripts found in her personal library, this paper shows how under the influence of Muhammad Asad, she presented Islam as a religion and complete civilisation. It is argued that the later years of her life witnessed a shift in her understanding of Islam. Although she is considered a staunch supporter of Jamāʿat-i Islāmī, *which is generally regarded as an anti-Sufi movement, she shows a great interest in Sufism and Islamic art, which expresses her devotion to what Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to as the traditional Islam.*

Keywords

Maryam Jameelah, sufism, *Jamāʿat-i Islāmī*, traditionalism, fundamentalism, Islamic art.

A Biographical Sketch of Maryam Jameelah

Born in 1934 as Margret Marcus, Maryam Jameelah was an American-Jewish convert to Islam. Her father, Herbert Marcus, was a businessman whereas her mother, Maira Marcus, was a social worker. Her forefathers were followers of a German Jewish Philosopher Moses Mendelssohn's (1729–1786) reform movement (Haskalah). Therefore, she noticed a strong impact of Mendelssohn's thought not only upon her own family but also upon other

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reform Jewish families in America. The study of Haskalah, however, instigated her dislike for the modernist/rationalist interpretations of religion for she thought that such interpretations had distanced German Jewry from its ancestral religion.[1] Her parents raised her in a Christian environment and motivated her to accept Christianity. However, unlike them, she did not show any interest in embracing it.[2] Nor did she admire the way her family adopted the American materialistic outlook. Consequently, she complained about the absence of spirituality in her home.[3] Thirst for spirituality encouraged her to study the mystical dimensions of world religions. John Esposito and John Voll maintain that she was "an unusual child in many ways, one whose personality and intellectual/religious orientation often ran counter to her culture's norms and expectations."[4] American pop music and mixed dance parties had no charm for her. She was a lover of oriental culture and would love classical music. Therefore, unlike other children of her age, she mostly spent a friendless life.

Despite the fact that she got a secular education, she was interested in religious studies from her childhood. The anti-Semitic attitudes of Christians[5] intrigued her to study both Judaism and Christianity. While studying the Jewish texts, she came to know that Abraham (peace be on him) was the forefather of both Arabs and Jews. This discovery developed her interest in Islam and the Arab world.[6] Second World War revealed hatred of Americans for Arabs and Turks to her. Out of curiosity, she started reading more and more about Arab and Islamic culture.

The search for the purpose of life and study of the doctrine of eschatology persuaded her to study world religions with greater interest. Initially, she preferred to find the answers to her questions in the Old Testament. However, her study of the Jewish sources failed to quench her spiritual thirst.

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[1] Maryam Jameelah, review of *Militant Islam*, by Godfrey H. Jansen, *Muslim World Book Review* 1, no. 2 (1981): 19; Jameelah, *Islam and Western Society: A Refutation of the Modern Way of Life* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1990), 28.

[2] Jameelah, *Western Civilization Condemned by Itself: A Comprehensive Study of Moral Retrogression and Its Consequences*, 2 vols. (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1971), 1:xi.

[3] Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America: The Story of One Western Convert's Quest for the Truth* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1989), 7.

[4] John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 54.

[5] For details on anti-Semitism in American history, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[6] Margaret Marcus (Maryam Jameelah) to Maulana Maudoodi, New York, 31 January 1961, in *Correspondence between Maulana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1969), 9.

Consequently, she started studying the sacred books of other religions.[7] Her study of the Qur'ān answered her various questions. She recalls, "I never knew that Guidance until I read in the opening of the second Surah."[8] Moreover, she explored the works of prominent Muslim scholars such as Muhammad Asad (1900–1992), Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), and Abū 'l-A'lā Maudūdī (1903–1979), which significantly increased her knowledge of Islam and the Muslim world. Due to her psychological problems, she spent almost two years in mental asylums where she decided to embrace Islam provided she would recover from her illness.[9] After her recovery, however, she preferred to first make acquaintance with the neighbouring Muslim community. She formally embraced Islam in 1960. After two years, she migrated to Pakistan on the invitation of Maudūdī. She became the second wife of Muhammad Yousuf Khan who was a devoted worker of the politico-religious movement *Jamā'at-i Islāmī*. On October 31, 2012, she died at the age of 78, leaving two girls and two boys behind.

Many scholars argue that Jameelah presented a conservative[10] or rather fundamentalist[11] view of Islam. For them, Maudūdī and *Jamā'at-i Islāmī* played a vital role in shaping her ideas. However, Jameelah's own opinions suggest a different view in this regard. Though she supported the mission of the *Jamā'at-i Islāmī*,[12] she rejected the idea of Maudūdī's work playing any significant role in her literary career.[13] On the other hand, she regarded the writings of Asad as a source of inspiration for her literary career.[14] In her controversial work *The Convert*, Deborah Baker tried to understand the changes that happened in the ideology of Jameelah after the attacks of September 11, 2001.[15] However, despite Jameelah's insistence that she never intended to support extremism or

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[7] Maryam Jameelah, *Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab: Past and Present* (Delhi: Taj Company, 1993), xxiv.

[8] Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America*, 92.

[9] Jameelah, *Islam and Modernism* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1988), xi.

[10] Esposito and Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, 54.

[11] Marcia Hermansen, "Roads to Mecca: Conversion Narratives of European And Euro-American Muslims," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 1 (1999): 79.

[12] For example, Maryam Jameelah "The Jama'at-e-Islami, Pakistan" in Maryam Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1978), 327–83.

[13] Jameelah, preface to *Correspondence between Maulana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1969), ii.

[14] Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America*, 160.

[15] Deborah Baker, *The Convert: A Tale of Exile and Extremism* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2011). Jameelah was of the view that Baker presented a negative image of her. On her personal copy of *Convert*, she wrote, "Maryam Jameelah's life story from a Kaffir anti-Islam American viewpoint. Haider Maududi's interview was nothing but a big pack of lies!" This copy is available at the personal library of Jameelah.

wrote anything in favour of the September 11 attacks,[16] Baker depicted her as an extremist. I agree with Muhammad Asif Javid who holds that "Baker's personal interest in Jameelah as a forerunner of modern Islamic extremism influences her presentation stratagem."[17] It is pertinent to mention that when Fatimah Al-Zahra, a student of the University of the Punjab, Lahore, asked Jameelah to share her views about *Ṭālibān*, she replied, "Taliban rule is so unbearable that I prefer the present regime in power however un-Islamic and corrupt, of course, we all want *Shar'iat* but Taliban have taken it to extremes, giving nothing but a bad name to Islam to the West."

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– Maryam Jameelah

Figure 1: Jameelah's views about Ṭālibān in her own handwriting.[18]

Therefore, it can be argued that Jameelah was not in support of militant groups such as Ṭālibān, al-Qā'idah and Daulat-i Islāmiyah. For her, they were extremists who were far away from the true spirit of Islam. Her religious thought is often discussed in conjunction with her conversion, consequently resulting in explanation of her preference for Islam over other religions.[19] It is of paramount importance that although she lived for fifty years after her conversion to Islam, no attempt had ever been made to systematically analyse her understanding and presentation of Islam. The current paper first figures out the impact of Asad's thought on her life and then presents her understanding of Islam.

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[16] Baker, *Convert*, 123.
[17] Muhammad Asif Javid, "Constructing Life Narratives: The Multiple Versions of Maryam Jameelah's Life" (master's thesis, Leiden University, 2018), i.
[18] Fatimah Al-Zahra, "Maryam Jameelah: Dīnī-o 'Ilmī Khidmāt" (master's thesis, University of the Punjab, Lahore, 2010), 134.
[19] For example, see Hermansen, "Roads to Mecca."

A Note on the Sources

This work uses Jameelah's published as well as unpublished writings, which I have collected from her personal library with the permission of her daughter, Maria Khanam.[20] The unpublished material includes manuscripts of Jameelah's writings, which she did not want to be published in her life and letters from Islamic missions, converts, publishers, and well-known scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Muhammad Hamidullah, and Kenneth Cregg. Jameelah did not keep the copies of her own letters. Therefore, what remains of this correspondence is only the replies of her correspondents. I have arranged this material in a chronological order to present a historical and comparative analysis of her published and unpublished works. This approach will help understand the evolution of her interpretations of Islam.

Influence of Muhammad Asad on Jameelah's Thought

During a visit to Jameelah's personal library in Lahore, I found a manuscript entitled "My Life Story: An American Muslim Convert between Two Worlds 1934–1975," containing information she did not want to share with anyone, perhaps not even with Khan Sahib, her husband. However, she did not deny its access to the scholars of oriental religions and cultures who wanted to explore the conversion experience of American-Muslim women after her death.[21] This manuscript provides a summary of her thoughts vis-à-vis her conversion, migration, and criticism of Western civilisation. It shows that analysis of Asad's life urged her to understand his conversion to Islam not only as a matter of his acceptance of a new religion but also a matter of his rejection of Western civilisation. Thus, writing about her understanding of Islam, she propagated it as a religion as well as a civilisation. She writes, "My concept of Islam was not a mere religion in the narrow sense but included an entire historical civilization."[22] Moreover, her various writings indicate that she was heavily influenced by the works of Asad.[23] His *The Road to Mecca* inspired her to look at the world from a different angle. Classical Arab culture, so eloquently explained by Asad, attracted her attention and she started

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[20] I am indebted to the family of Maryam Jameelah for providing me with the access to her personal data.

[21] Maryam Jameelah, "My Life Story: An American Muslim Convert between Two Worlds 1934–1975" (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

[22] Ibid.

[23] Jameelah, *A Great Islamic Movement in Turkey: Badee-u-Zaman Said Nursi* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1981), 3; Jameelah, review of *Islam at the Crossroads*, by Muhammad Asad, *Muslim World Book Review* 5, no. 4 (1985), 41; Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America*, 109, 68, 210.

thinking of spending the remainder of her life in a Muslim country. One may argue that Asad's works not only played an important role in her conversion to Islam but also encouraged her to migrate to Pakistan, criticise Western civilisation, and become an opponent of Zionism.

Presenting Islam as a Religion

She was against modernist interpretations of religious texts, discouraged *ijtihād*,[24] and criticised those who called for reform in religion. For her, Islam is a complete code of conduct, dealing with every facet of life, guiding its followers in both public and private spheres, and teaching them to live a total, complete, and comprehensive life.[25] She presented it as an eternal religion, existing since time immemorial. She was of the view that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) did not invent any new religion but revamped the law of the Prophet Moses (peace be on him), which was neglected by the Christians.[26] She argued that Crusades had played a central role in creating a false impression of Islam in Europe. It was propagated during those wars that followers of Islam were "Mohammedans" as if they worshiped their Prophet.[27] In her writings, she rejects such ideas assuring her readers that Islam means nothing but a total submission to the will of one and only God. She believes that the Islamic concept of *ʿabd Allāh* (slave of God) frees humans from the slavery of fellow beings as it makes them realise their freedom.[28] For her, Islam and Muslims are intertwined "because the individual Muslim personifies Islam itself, Islam could not exist without him."[29] For this reason, Islam does not permit its followers to commit suicide or willfully injure themselves.

In late fifties and early sixties, there was hardly any Islamic mission from which one could learn about Islam.[30] She personally observed the problems of American people who were interested in Islam. Therefore, she decided to write for the English-speaking community of Europe and America. Her presentation of Islam clearly indicates that like other Muslim scholars she not

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[24] She was in favour of *ijtihād* in legal matters. In her various letters to a German convert, Fatima Grimm, she discussed her thought about legal *ijtihād*. For example, initially, she was not in favour of birth control. However, after years of discussion with Grimm on this matter, she changed her view. For more details, see Fatima Heeren Sarka to Maryam Jameelah, Tandern, 24 May 1972 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

[25] Jameelah, *Western Civilization Condemned by Itself*, 1:xii.

[26] Jameelah, *Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab*, 209.

[27] Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1978), 20.

[28] Ibid., 34.

[29] Jameelah, *Western Civilization Condemned by Itself*, 1:xii.

[30] Batoul Angell Morchid to Maryam Jameelah, Casablanca, 24 August, 2011 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

only tries to convince her readers that Islam is the only "true religion" but also assures them that it governs both their social and private lives. Thus, she believes that Islam keeps Muslims motivated even in the toughest conditions of their lives.

While explicating various features of Islam, Jameelah compared it with other world religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.[31] By doing so, she not only tried to prove the superiority of Islam over other faiths but also propagated her version of the comparative study of world religions. Assuring her readers of the universality of Islam, she drew their attention to its concept of God. She argued that unlike Judaism, Islam called humanity to a universal God, equality of humanity, and rejection of limited concepts such as that of "Chosen People."[32] She held that despite rejecting the tribal form of religion, Christianity was still confined to a limited concept of faith.[33] On the other hand, Islam, for her, presents a universal version of religion. She considered the preservation of the very name Islam a proof of Islam's maintaining its identity throughout history. Moreover, she held that it was not only the name that had been preserved but more importantly Islam preserved its scripture from human interpolations.[34] In her writings, she emerges as an ardent critic of Western civilisation. She thinks that philosophies, such as modernism, feminism, atheism, and materialism, aim at creating a Godless society. Therefore, through her presentation of Islam, she achieved multiple purposes. She criticised Christianity and Judaism, propagated her understanding of Islam, and finally, tried to assure her readers that instead of adopting modern philosophies, they must aim for a religious life because it will free them from the slavery of human fellows.

Jameelah counts Prophetic traditions among the cardinal parts of Islam. Therefore, she holds that without a thorough understanding of Prophetic traditions, it is not possible to follow the teachings of the Qur'ān. In her *Islam in Theory and Practice*, she defines the correlation of *ḥadīth* and the Qur'ān saying that "one is meaningless without the other."[35] She argues that the Qur'ān only presents a general outline while its details are found in the *sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be on him).[36] The Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet (peace be on him) because he was the best person to teach its meanings.

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[31] For discussion on Jameelah's study of world religions, see Zohaib Ahmad, "Maryam Jamīlah kā Dhihnī-o Fikrī Irtiqā: Aik Tajziyātī Muṭāla'ah," *Fikr-o Naẓar* 54, no. 3 (2017): 89–114.

[32] Jameelah, *Islam Versus Ahl al-Kitab*, 3.

[33] She holds that this was the reason why Christianity was named after its founder Jesus Christ (peace be on him). For details, see ibid., 400.

[34] Jameelah, *Western Civilization Condemned by Itself*, 1:xii.

[35] Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice*, 41.

[36] Jameelah, *Islam and Western Society*, 4.

Jameelah's description of the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* clearly indicated her agreement with the orthodox Muslim scholars on the issue. Thus, unlike her contemporaries such as Ghulām Aḥmad Parvēz (1903–1985), she supported the traditional viewpoint of Islam arguing that the Qur'ān and the *sunnah* are intertwined. Understanding of the former is bound to the understanding of the latter.

Presenting Islam as a Civilisation

According to her, Islam is not only a religion but a complete civilisation. In her book, *Islam and Modernism*, she devoted a complete article entitled "Islam is a Civilization" to prove that Islam provides a theoretical as well as a practical model of life. Thus, she presents Islam as a practical religion, which has the ability to solve the problems of humanity in its entirety. She refers to pre-Islamic Arabia in order to prove her point. She argues that before the advent of Islam, Arabs and Turks were regarded as savages. It was nothing but Islamic civilisation that reformed them.[37] It enlightened them without resorting to any genocidal massacre, forced assimilation, and racial persecution. Therefore, for her, Islam "is no mere accessory to life but a life itself."[38] She tried to assure her readers that unlike Judaism, Christianity, and paganism, Islam peacefully turned the savages of Arabia into civilised Muslims. In this way, she believes that for the revival of Islamic civilisation in the modern world, it is necessary to present Islam not as a mere set of values and ideals "but as a specific civilization based on absolute, transcendental values which was, until the very recent past, an autonomous, independent historical reality."[39] Moreover, through her portrayal of the pre-Islamic Arabia, she implicitly criticises the founders of modern America who, in their overwhelming desire to establish a new empire, massacred the native American-Indian tribes culminating in extermination of an entire civilisation.[40]

Analysing the relationship of Islamic civilisation with Western one, she notes the adverse impact of the latter on the former. She believes that modern philosophies corrupted the social, cultural, and political spheres of Islamic civilisation. Providing an example, she refers to the adverse effects of nationalism on the modern Muslims. She thought that instead of sticking to the *millah* system, Turk leaders preferred nationalism that led them to an

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[37] Ibid., 197.
[38] Jameelah, *Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab*, 408.
[39] Jameelah, *Islam and Modernism*, 36.
[40] For details, see her letters to her parents and sister. Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America*, 9, 27–28, 50, 55.

intense contempt for Arabs.[41] Pointing out the scientific advancement of Islamic civilisation, she reminds her readers of the sciences promoted by the Muslim scholars. She holds that Muslims contributed to the scientific thought through their nature-friendly inventions whereas modern scientific inventions adversely affect the global environment. Thus, she concludes that sciences which Muslims developed were different from Western sciences not only in their aims and ideals but also in their character.[42] However, it does not follow that she asks Muslims not to benefit from the contributions of Western scholarship. She believes that there are certain things which are useful and must be shared with everyone. She praises modern science for its achievements in the fields of medicine and technology. What she criticises is, however, the adverse impact of Western civilisation on the Muslim identity.[43] Writing against the makers of modern Western civilisation who, for her, are mostly atheists and materialists, Jameelah pays tribute to Muslim scholars who brought about reconciliation between science, religion and nature. They proved that scientific advancements could be made without breaking the ties with religion and nature.[44] By doing so, she not only encourages Muslims to receive scientific education but also points out an important difference between Islamic and modern Western civilisations. She was convinced that it was not the job of science to guide humans on love, peace, or ethics. Her support for scientific education, however, distinguishes her from those orthodox Muslim scholars who were not in favour of the study of the modern sciences.

Jameelah keenly observes the shortcomings of the industrial revolution. While comparing the scientific models of both Islamic and Western civilisations, she criticises those aspects of modern American culture, which, in her view, are detrimental to physical environment. From her childhood, Jameelah preferred a nature-friendly life. She used to "think that [native American] Indian way of life was superior to ours because when they ruled this land, America was a beautiful rich country with virgin nature intact while the white man has polluted it from one end to the other."[45] Thus, her environment-friendly nature was also a reason for preferring Islamic civilisation over modern Western civilisation.

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[41] Jameelah, *Islam and Modernism*, 188.
[42] Jameelah, review of *Muslims in the West: The Message and Mission*, by Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Muslim World Book Review* 5, no. 2 (1985): 12.
[43] Jameelah, *Islam and Western Society*, 302.
[44] Jameelah, review of *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity*, ed. Sharifah Shifa al-Attas, *Muslim World Book Review* 18, no. 2 (1998): 18.
[45] Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America*, 50.

Supporting Islamic Art

Jameelah was interested in art and drawing since her childhood. However, when Maudūdī shared with her his view about the prohibition of pictures in Islam,[46] she stopped practicing art. She later donated her artwork to the New York Public Library. Under Maudūdī's influence, she first discouraged practicing any form of art. She was even against taking pictures for using on passports. She writes,

> Pagan influences have taken such hold upon us that today no Muslim can perform Haj without having his passport accompanied by his picture. During the Haj season, Mecca is crowded with photographers who care nothing for experiencing its true spiritual significance but eager only to provide some entertainment for the readers of their newspapers and magazines.[47]

However, in her later years, she started writing in support of art. In her book reviews, she ardently advocates Islamic art. Her personal library contains various sketches that she used to draw for her novel *Ahmad Khalil*. It is not clear whether she changed her views about art due to the *fatwā*s, which Muslim scholars issued in favour of art or her own readings encouraged her to support traditional forms of Islamic art. Renowned traditionalist Seyyed Hossein Nasr also encouraged her to study Islamic art. He sent her material on this subject. Both would share their views with each other about Islamic art. In a letter dated June 21, 1978, he wrote to her, "One of the best ways in our times to approach the essence of Islam and its spirituality is through the authentic expressions of Islamic art which unfortunately until now have been neglected for the most part."[48] It shows that Jameelah discussed Islamic art with Nasr and asked him to send her his books on the topic. Moreover, possible influence of Sadia Khalifa, a Western convert to Islam, on Jameelah's views about art and religion cannot be denied. Khalifa herself was an artist. In her letters, she criticised Jameelah's fundamentalist approach to art saying, "Can you not realise that true creative art comes from God? Do you not know that Giotto, Fillip Lippi, Michelangelo, were all religious men?"[49] However, Khalifa also maintained that she was not in favour of the practice of Western

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[46] Ibid., 222.

[47] Jameelah, *Islam versus the West*, 106.

[48] Seyyed Hossein Nasr to Maryam Jameelah, Iran, 21 June 1978 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

[49] Sadia Khalifa to Maryam Jameelah, Riyadh, 8 February 1975 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

art in "an ideal Islamic state." She assured Jameelah that she was just pointing out that art was an inevitable part of a civilisation.

Jameelah's responses to these letters are not available. However, another letter of Khalifa implies that she started reconsidering her idea of art. Khalifa writes, "In conclusion, I appreciate your gesture to consider revising and toning down some of the expressions to a more moderate degree."[50] The letters available in the personal library of Jameelah indicate that her correspondence with Khalifa started roughly in 1975 and ended in 1977. After 1980, Jameelah stopped writing books[51] and confined herself to publishing book reviews. In her book reviews, she not only supported Islamic art but also criticised those who were not in its favour. In this respect, she even criticised Maudūdī.[52] However, in any case, she was not in favour of modern Western art. Criticising modern art for its negation of God and the purpose of life, she claimed that it was religion which provided ethical and spiritual bases to art.[53] Comparing Islamic art with modern Western one, she held that the latter was incapable of presenting spiritual dimensions of life. However, she was convinced that in modern days, Islamic civilisation along with its art was dying. She argued that Islamic art fell into a decline during colonial era and that Muslims' attitude was the major cause of this decline. She believes that in Muslim countries most of the artists are primarily influenced by Western art that results in typically constructing "monasteries" such as the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad and the Defense Housing Mosque in Karachi. In her only novel *Ahmad Khalil*, she provides the example of Muslim calligraphy and reminds her fellow Muslims that Islamic art is not a matter of individual expression. Rather it is the legacy of an entire civilisation, a tradition of their forefathers, and in itself a religious experience.[54] She concludes saying,

> Most hostile to Islamic art may be the Wahhabi/Salafists who have ruthlessly destroyed nearly all the historic architecture of Arabia and the Gulf, including numerous holy places in Makkah and Madinah, sparing only the Kabbah and the Prophet's last resting place.[55]

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[50] Khalifa to Jameelah, Riyadh, 27 March 1975 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

[51] Except for the publication of her two autobiographies.

[52] Maryam Jameelah, review of *Through Muslim Eyes: M. Rashīd Riḍā and the West* by Emad Eldin Shahin, *Muslim World Book Review* 5, no. 3 (1995): 19.

[53] Jameelah to Maulana Maudoodi, New York, 25 January 1962, in *Correspondence between Maulana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1969), 64.

[54] Jameelah, *Ahmad Khalil: The Story of a Palestinian Refuge and His Family* (Lahore: Mohammad Yusuf Khan, 1979), 215.

[55] Jameelah, review of *Fine Arts of Islamic Civilisation*, by Muhammad Abdul Jabbar Beg, *Muslim World Book Review* 27, no. 4 (2007): 93.

Thus, she criticised the Salafi school of thought lamenting that its hostility to Islamic art led to the destruction of the historical architecture of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries.

Attitude towards Sufism

Jameelah is considered a staunch supporter of *Jamāʿat-i Islāmī*,[56] which is generally perceived as an anti-Sufi movement.[57] However, during the course of the present research, it has been noted that she was intrigued by Sufism and even had defended it in her writings. Given her thirst for spirituality, it is understandable why life in the prevailing sociocultural environment of the United States became so difficult for her. She had no contact with Muslim counselors or mentors who could have helped her adjust herself to a new situation after her conversion to Islam.

In Jameelah's own words, she was spiritually troubled by living amidst what she perceived and termed as the "white man's materialistic outlook." The absence of spirituality in her home during her childhood was but a microcosm of this outlook.[58] It may be surmised that the primary reason for her taking almost ten years to embrace Islam, although driven by the need of her innately spiritual nature, was the difficulty of shaking off this "materialistic outlook." She attributed this outlook to Western society and labeled it as a hideous disease.[59] It is noteworthy, however, that her migration from the materialistic environment of the late twentieth-century USA to Pakistan could not effectively quench her spiritual thirst. Pakistani society did not live up to her expectations. She was disappointed to find that it was as materialistic as Western society.

As reflected in the letters of Zeba Siddiqui, Jameelah, turned to Sufism to find spiritual satisfaction. What remains of this correspondence, however, consists only of letters from Siddiqui to her. The unavailability of Jameelah's replies makes it difficult to analyse and understand the nature and process of her inclination towards Sufism. However, existing material helps to get a hint of it. Their correspondence reflects that from 1980 until her death, she used to share her views about Sufism with Siddiqui. In her letters, Siddiqui drew

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[56] For example, see Amina Jamal, *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan: Vanguard of a New Modernity?* (New Jersey: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 123.
[57] Marcia Hermansen, "The Academic Studies of Sufism at American Universities," in *Observing the Observer: The State of Islamic Studies in American Universities*, ed. Mumtaz Ahmad, Zahid Bukhari, and Sulayman Nyang (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 102.
[58] Maryam Jameelah, *Westernization and Human Welfare* (Delhi: New Crescent, 1997), 26.
[59] Jameelah, *Islam and Western Society*, 307.

Jameelah's attention to the well-known Naqshbandī shaykh, Nāẓim al-Ḥaqqānī (1922–2014). Whether Jameelah became the disciple of Nāẓim is not known. However, the question is how Jameelah reconciled her fundamentalist view of Islam with traditional and spiritual understanding and practices of Sufism. A letter to her parents, dated April 24, 1962, may shed some light on this question. She writes,

> It is imperative for Muslims to accept the whole of Islam, not only the Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah but the four Imams and their traditional orthodox interpreters, the heritage of *Tasawwaf*, along with all the arts and sciences developed under Islamic civilization, the entire aesthetic and historical heritage of that culture, and Islamic history down to 1924 when Ataturk abolished the Khilafat and made his country a thoroughly secularized state.[60]

In this letter, Jameelah expressed her conviction that the modern Muslim reformers who rejected *ḥadīth*, the four schools of *fiqh*, *taṣawwuf*, the orthodoxy of the *'ulamā'* and accepted and trusted classical Islamic sources were mistaken in their understandings and conclusions. Her understanding of Islam seems closer to what Nasr terms as the traditional Islam. He thinks that those who defend the tradition, support imitation (*taqlīd*), adopt Sufism, insist upon the "Islamicity" of Islamic art are followers of traditional Islam.[61] Nasr was a penfriend of Jameelah. He not only shared his works on spirituality and art with her but also introduced her to the works of Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) such as *Understanding Islam* and *Dimensions of Islam*.[62] She had almost all works of Nasr in her personal library. Therefore, one may surmise that either she was influenced by his writings or both of them understood and interpreted Islam in a similar fashion. As the above-mentioned quotation is taken from a letter writen in 1962, the latter opinion seems more plausible.

She challenged and criticised the views of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792), the famous Arab theologian and aponym of the Wahhābī sect. She refers to his denigration of Sufism and allegation that Sufism is responsible for the present-day decline of the Muslim *ummah* and its current stagnation.[63] Later, however, Jameelah revised her view concerning Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's

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[60] Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America*, 215.

[61] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1994), 15–16.

[62] Nasr to Maryam Jameelah, Tehran, 8 April 1972 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

[63] Jameelah, *Memories of Childhood in America*, 214–15.

position on *taṣawwuf* and contrary to the opinions of many scholars,[64] maintained that he "was not opposed to Tasawwuf as such." Rather, he opposed exaggerated respect for saints and their graves, ascription of divine powers to saints, and other practices, which he classified as *shirk* (i.e., ascribing divinity or its attributes to anyone or anything other than God). However, finding it impossible to halt such practices that were, in his view, remnants of pre-Islamic or folk traditions, he resorted to condemning Sufism as a whole.[65]

Islam in Theory and Practice, her most important work, contains a section "Supplication to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)" that begins with *Assalam alaikum ya rasul allah*[66] (meaning "Peace be on you, O Messenger of Allah"); an oft-repeated greeting used in Sufi circles.[67] This supplication also contains many prayers directed towards the Prophet (peace be on him). Robert Abd al-Rahman, an American-Muslim convert, wrote a letter to Jameelah showing doubt about the authenticity of those prayers and recommended her to consider revision of that section of the book. He argued that apart from the contents of supplication, its "title itself can be considered *shirk* since it is directed *to* the Prophet."[68] Abd al-Rahman thought that her inclination towards Sufism encouraged her to pen this supplication. Therefore, he suggested her some readings, advising her to weigh the teachings of Sufism against those of the Qur'ān and the Prophet's (peace be on him) *sunnah*. Accepting his criticism, Jameelah stopped using this supplication,[69] without, however, renouncing Sufism, which she continued to defend in her subsequent book reviews.[70]

Siddiqui also sent some books to Jameelah on Sufism. Among them was the biography of Nāẓim al-Ḥaqqānī about which Jameelah penned the

[64] Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 83; William Rory Dickson, *Living Sufism in North America: Between Tradition and Transformation* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 30; Yoginder Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers: Madrasas and Islamic Education in India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2005), xviii.

[65] Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice*, 119–20.

[66] Moreover, the tone of the article suggests that Maryam Jameelah had inclination towards the *Ahl al-sunnat wa 'l jamā'at*, which is also referred to as a Sufi movement. For details, see ibid., 411–15.

[67] As-Sayyid Nurjan Mirahmadi and Hedieh Mirahmadi, *The Healing Power of Sufi Meditation* (Fenton, MI: Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order of America, 2005), 64.

[68] Robert Abd Al-Rahman to Maryam Jameelah, Safat, 8 August 1994 (unpublished manuscript personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

[69] Abd Al-Rahman to Jameelah, Safat, 19 December 1994.

[70] For example, see Jameelah, review of *Through Muslim Eyes*, 19.

following words: "A supreme guide to the spiritual life. One who follows this will insha'allah be successful in this life and in the eternal life Hereafter!"

A supreme guide to the
spiritual life, One who
follows this will insha'allah
be successful in this life
and in the eternal life
Hereafter!

Figure 2: Maryam Jameelah's opinion about the biography of Nāẓim al-Ḥaqqānī in her own handwriting.[71]

It is evident that Siddiqui intrigued Jameelah towards Sufism through her letters. In a letter to Jameelah, she expressed her happiness when she knew that Jameelah went to the shrine of the famous Sufi saint 'Alī Hujvīrī. She wrote, "I felt so happy that you went to Data Sahib's *mazar* and felt the *barakah*."[72]

However, it was not only Siddiqui who encouraged Jameelah to take interest in Sufism. Several other correspondents also shared their interest in Islamic spirituality with her. For example, Nasr appreciated her inclination towards Sufism, saying, "I also pray that gradually you become more acquainted with Sufism and the esoteric teachings of Islam which in their metaphysical dimension contain all intellectual answers to the aberrations of the modern world."[73] Fatima Grimm, a Christian convert to Islam, also encouraged Jameelah to take interest in Sufism and criticised those scholars who were against Sufism, asking, "How dare one say so generally that Sufism is bad only because some manifestations of it showed distorted practices?"[74] In a letter to Jameelah, Besa Mazhar motivated her to practice *dhikr*. Mazhar

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[71] Personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore.

[72] Zeba Siddiqui to Maryam Jameelah, Fort Collins, 26 May 1982 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

[73] Nasr to Jameelah, Tehran, 8 April 1972.

[74] For details, see Fatima Heeren Sarka to Maryam Jameelah, Tandern, 7 August 1974 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).

knew that Jameelah's inclination towards Sufism would create certain hurdles in her Pakistani husband's home as she said, "The environment in which you live is not very spiritually stimulating, this going by your mention of Wahhabi sympathizers and precisely anti-Sufi milieu."[75] Similarly, Muhammad Yousuf Ahsan, in a letter to Jameelah, persuaded her to adopt the Sufi manner of *dhikr*.[76]

After 1980, Jameelah restricted her literary work to writing book reviews. In her later writings, she criticised scholars, including Asad[77] and Maudūdī,[78] who, in her view, wrote against Sufism.[79] She criticised the Salafī school of thought particularly for not considering Sufism to be a part of Islam. For her, Sufism was described in *ḥadīth* terminology as *iḥsān* which "was the source of all the values, institutions and cultural expressions of the historic traditional Islamic civilization."[80] She believed that there were certain Sufi orders such as the Darqawī or Naqshbandī Orders which "to this day combine the deepest spiritual dimension of *Tasawwuf* with strict adherence to the Shari'ah."[81] This opinion was undoubtedly influenced by her acquaintance with the life and teachings of shaykh Nāẓim al-Ḥaqqānī. Her book reviews led Nasr to comment,

> Writings of the well-known writer Maryam Jameelah, which have always been strongly anti-modern, were close to the new "fundamentalist" perspective in many ways but that more recently she has come to embrace the traditional point of view as seen in some of her extensive book reviews of the past two or three years.[82]

This shows that Jameelah's support for traditional Islam is more evident in her book reviews than in her books.

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[75] For details, see Besa Mazhar to Maryam Jameelah, 16 November 1984 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).
[76] For details, see Muhammad Yusuf Ahsan to Maryam Jameelah, Lahore, 28 October 1985 (unpublished manuscript, personal library of Maryam Jameelah, Lahore).
[77] Jameelah, review of *Islam at the Crossroads*, 40.
[78] Jameelah, review of *Through Muslim Eyes*, 19.
[79] For example, see Jameelah, review of *Understanding Islam and Dimensions of Islam*, by Frithjof Schuon, *Muslim World Book Review* 6, no. 4 (1986): 10; Jameelah, review of *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-Alawi: His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy*, by Martin Lings, *Muslim World Book Review* 15, no. 2 (1995): 18; Jameelah, review of *Rābi'a: The Mystic and her Fellow-Saints*, by Margaret Smith, *Muslim World Book Review* 16, no. 2 (1996): 42.
[80] Jameelah, review of *Islam against the West*, by William L. Cleveland, *Muslim World Book Review* 7, no. 2 (1987): 63.
[81] Jameelah, review of *Knowledge And the Sacred*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Muslim World Book Review* 4, no. 1 (1983): 20.
[82] Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 23n2.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to establish that under the influence of Asad, Jameelah understood and presented Islam both as a religion and civilisation. She believed that the modernist scholars who rejected *ḥadīth*, *sunnah*, four schools of *fiqh*, Sufism, orthodoxy of the *'ulamā'*, Islamic arts, and other Islamic sciences were mistaken in their assessments. Her concept of Islam was closer to Nasr's understanding of the traditional Islam.

She supports the traditionalist point of view in her later writings, especially in her book reviews. However, her earlier writings also contained certain pointers to her inclination towards traditionalism. Her support for Sufism and Islamic art is an evidence of this. However, this does not mean that she stopped criticising modernist interpretations of Islam. In fact, criticism of modernism and Western civilisation remained an essential feature of her writings. In this respect, she even criticised Maudūdī and Asad.

Jameelah was interested in the spiritual aspect of religion, which is generally known as Sufism or *taṣawwuf*. However, the unavailability of her correspondence and concealment of her inclination towards Sufism make it difficult to assess her interest in Sufism in detail. Nevertheless, it has been argued that she was intrigued by the spiritual dimension of Islam in order to quench the spiritual thirst that she had been feeling since her childhood. Some of Jameelah's penfriends, particularly Zeba Siddiqui, recognised this aspect of her life. When they drew her attention to this aspect, they received an instantaneous response from her. She not only started practicing Naqshbandī *dhikr* but also defended orthodox Sufism in her later book reviews.

Her tumultuous life witnesses a paradigmatic shift both in her understanding and presentation of Islam. This indicates an evolution in her thoughts and ideas. Her book reviews have not been properly studied. This resulted in overlooking the complexities of her interpretations of Islam. Thus, those who did not read her book reviews, considered her an extremist presenting a fundamentalist view of Islam. However, an analysis of her book reviews reveals that she became an advocate of traditional Islam in her later life.

